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Art Needlework.

THE ART OF EMBROIDERY.

IV.

TAPESTRY work is the modern name for the kind of embroidery classed by Dr. Rock as the ancient "opus pulvinarium," or cushion-stitch. Its peculiarity, as distinguished from ordinary embroidery, is that it is worked on canvas, the threads of which regulate the length and the direction of the stitches, which have, therefore, always a somewhat mechanical exactness, and can easily be imitated by machinery. In the ancient specimens of this work, as well as in the modern Turkish examples, the canvas used is merely a coarse, loosely-woven, hand-made linen. Although there is a certain amount of regularity about the number of threads over which the stitches are taken, there is none of that mechanical exactness which work done on the modern canvas presents, and which is of itself a very great detractor from its artistic excellence. This modern canvas came into use with the introduction of machinery into weaving, and it had the most serious effect in lowering hand-tapestry to the wretched state which caused a reaction among all persons of educated taste a few years ago—a reaction so sweeping in its results that not only did "Berlin wool work," as it was called, become a thing of which its possessors were ashamed, and which was rigidly expelled from all houses with any pretensions to good style, but the very stitch fell into disrepute, and to this day cross-stitch is looked on with disfavor, as only fit for little out-of-the-way country towns and people of a very humble class.

An attempt was made a few years ago to revive it in the toilet-covers and table-linen largely executed in Germany; but the decorative work which comes to us from that country is rarely marked by any artistic merit; and although some of the cross-stitch work copied from old examples was very pretty, it was as mechanical as possible. And being immediately imitated by machinery with such perfection that it was sometimes impossible to distinguish it from hand labor, the latter naturally fell into discredit, and is now only practised as "fancy-work" by idle ladies, who have time to kill in one way or another, as a necessity of their daily lives.

There is, however, not the smallest reason why needle-tapestry should be condemned as inartistic; and its superiority in resistance to wear and tear is such as to make it most suitable for chair-seats and cushions, kneelers and pede mats for church use, and, in fact, for any purpose where the embroidery is likely to be subjected to much hard usage.

Before proceeding to describe the stitches, it may be remarked that if a coarse linen can be found sufficiently even in its weaving, it would be well to use it, after the worker has gained sufficient experience to work evenly on it; and that if modern canvas is used at all, it should be as soft as possible, and woven in even threads—never, by any means, making use of that which is woven with a thick wool and divided into groups of two or three threads, called "Penelope canvas." The illustration of cross-stitches given herewith will show the kind of canvas that should be used.

Tent-stitch, which is the simplest form of canvas work, is formed by carrying the thread, as it comes from beneath, over a single cross of the warp and woof of the canvas (A). Many of the ancient pieces of work are wholly executed in tent-stitch, and it was much used for the finer portions of cushion embroidery. Worked on the old coarse linen canvas, it was always a little uneven. Some very fine specimens are found of the time of the Stuarts and of Queen Elizabeth in richness over ordinary cross-stitch will at once become apparent.

Even for ordinary work on linen this stitch should be used in preference to the other; but for tapestry, to be used for chair or stool covers, cushions and the like, there is no comparison to be made between the two methods.

Ordinary cross-stitch (B) is begun in the same way as tent, and the thread is then carried across in an opposite direction over the first stitch, forming a cross. There are several ways of working cross-stitch. It may be worked from right to left, or from left to right, or in a direction up and down. In any case, the cross is the same, but a considerable difference will be observed in the appearance of the stitches consequent on the direction of the crossing stitch, which is, of course, uppermost. It would be well to try the different effect of these stitches in practice, as a great deal depends on it in working cross-stitch artistically.

A careful comparison of an example of old cross-stitch with some of the debased work fashionable thirty years ago, and known as Berlin wool work, will show that in the latter mere mechanical evenness is aimed at. The work is done in long rows of stitches, all carefully crossed in the same direction. In fact, it was customary, when this work was at its lowest ebb, to carry a long thread of the wool along the surface of the canvas, and work a tent-stitch across it, so as to produce the effect, without the trouble, of cross-stitch. At the best, a long row of tent-stitches was worked in one direction, and then a row of stitches crossing them. In the old work each stitch is worked separately and completed at once. A trial of these two methods of working cross-stitch will best show the superiority of the old method, as it is difficult to realize in any other way. In practice, however, it makes all the difference between hand and machine work, and between intelligent and unintelligent decoration.

Persian cross-stitch (C) is formed by taking the worsted or silk with which you are working across two or more threads of the canvas in one direction, and crossing the stitch thus made by carrying it back over one thread only of the canvas. The principle is, that in place of the stitch, when finished, being a St. Andrew's

cross, with four equal rays, like ordinary cross-stitch, the cross is always at the extremity of the stitch; and after a little has been worked in this way, the effect produced is that of a plait. Much of the ancient Persian work, and almost, if not all, the Turkish, is worked from left to right. In this form (D) it is simply herring-bone stitch, which has already been described. On referring to the illustration, it will be seen that there are two distinct lines of little crosses—one at each end of the stitch. Persian cross-stitch may be worked either from left to right or from right to left.

One or two varieties of this stitch should be tried in masses before any piece of decorative work is attempted. Its superiority in

worker. Considerable differences may be made in the effect by using thick strands of wool and silk. In E 1 the stitch is worked in a direction away from the embroiderer, or exactly the contrary way to seamstress' feather-stitch, already described. Supposing a light pencil line to be marked on the material, so as to keep the centre straight, a long stitch is taken alternately to right and left of the pencil line in an ascending direction, always keeping the thread on the inside of the needle—that is, on the side next the centre line. In E 2 the long sloping stitch is crossed by a small stitch in the centre. It is made by working from right to left, taking the long stitch first, and bringing the needle up about the centre of it, a little to the left. The point of the needle is then inserted at an equal distance on the right-hand side of the long stitch, and is brought out again on the same level as the last long stitch, but slightly to the left. In these stitches, if worked on linen, or on any plain material, it will be necessary to mark two parallel lines, so as to keep the width even, unless the eye of the embroiderer be remarkably accurate, or the threads of the web are sufficiently distinct to act as a guide. In E 3 the stitch is worked exactly as the preceding one, except that there is a double cross—that is to say, the small crossing stitches are taken at each end of the long stitch in place of in the centre. In E 4 the cross-stitch is placed at one end of the long stitch.

L. HIGGIN.

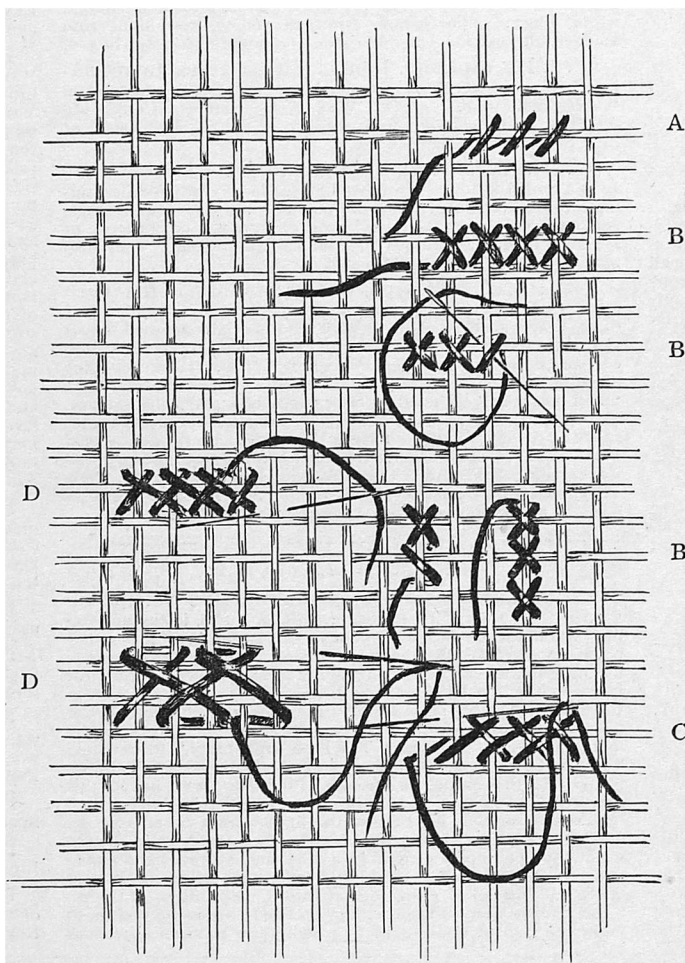


FIG. 14. TENT AND CROSS STITCHES.

Correspondence.

REVIVING AN OLD OIL-PAINTING.

SIR: Can the tone of a finished oil-painting be altered by glazing or otherwise? I have a small landscape (painted some time ago) in which the colors are dull and cold, giving the picture a dead flat look, although there is no lack of shadow in it. If there is any way of warming and brightening the colors I should be glad to know it. I should also like to know whether it will darken the picture?

H. P. S., Niagara Falls.

If the picture has not been already varnished, it can be glazed without any trouble. The surface must first be wiped off with a rag dipped in clean water, and when the surface is dry a flat bristle brush dipped in oil is passed all over it, and the oil is then rubbed in with a clean rag. Next, mix well a little yellow ochre with poppy oil, and apply it with the same brush, rubbing it thoroughly into the painting. The color should be further rubbed in with the fingers. This will warm the whole tone of the picture, without materially darkening it.

GLAZING WITH BITUMEN.

SIR: In the November number of The Art Amateur you tell how an eminent painter harmonized his skies: "After painting them in solid color, and allowing them to become thoroughly dry, he glazes them with bitumen, which he rubs off, till no vestige of it is observable, with an oily rag." Will you tell me what is meant by glaze in the above quotation? Is it simply the paint much diluted with oil?

H. P. S., Niagara Falls.

You seem to be in some doubt about the meaning of the term "glazing." It consists of mixing a transparent pigment with a medium of oil or varnish and applying it over an opaque color on the canvas. It should only be done with colors known to be permanent. The method of some artists referred to, of glazing with bitumen, should not be attempted by students and amateurs, as it is not recommended or taught in the regular methods of painting. Bitumen is considered an unsafe color, which turns black in time. Artists who have arrived at a certain standing have, of course, a right to adopt any eccentric or original methods which seem good to them. There is no advantage in copying any mannerism of this sort, of which an imitator would be sure to get all the bad effects without the advantages, which may be known only to the originator through personal experiment.

"MAROUFLÉ."

SIR: What is the "Marouflé" process of mural painting?

H. T., Boston.

It is not a process of mural painting. The term simply applies to the mounting of decorative canvases, which, instead of being stretched on frames, are pasted to the wall with some strongly adhesive substance. The back of the canvas is thus protected from damp, and the canvas itself protects the plaster.

HAND-PAINTED "FAVORS."

MRS. T. F. J., Lake Geneva, Wis.—Among new designs for lunch favors that are home-made and inexpensive are pocket pin-cushions in the shape of animals' heads, especially those of the cat and pug dog. Two pieces of cardboard are cut out in the proper shape, with a piece of flannel between; these are then covered with silk, satin or velvet, on which is painted, with opaque water-color, the features of the animal selected. This should be done in a simple and decorative way, without much detail or finish. Another favor for gentlemen is a blotter cut in some fantastic shape, such as an owl, a leaf or a fan. The outside is made of stiff water-color paper; inside are several sheets of blotting paper of various colors. A handsome bow of satin ribbon fastens them together. On the outside is drawn, in pen and ink, or painted in water-color, some pretty design, such as one of the charming little cupids by Boucher, which have been running through The Art Amateur recently. Those in

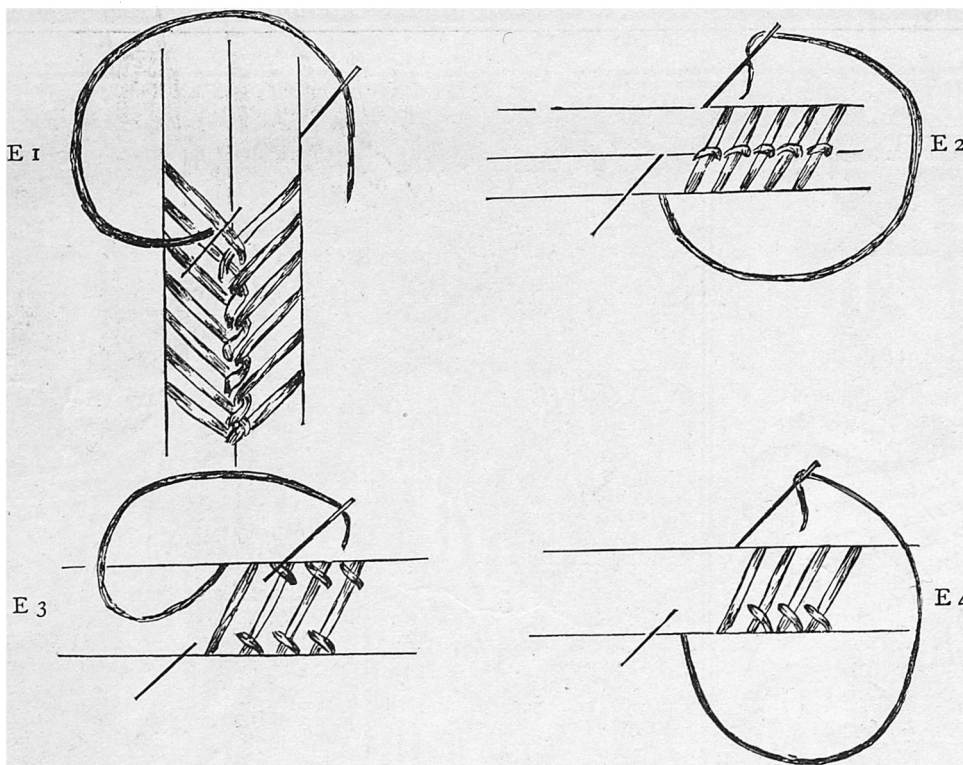


FIG. 15. FANCY CROSS-STITCHES.

There are many fancy kinds of tapestry stitches which may be used in solid embroidery, after the Persian style, but will, perhaps, be found most useful as filling stitches for old English outline work, or for ornamental borders. Of these some illustrations are given, but they may be almost infinitely varied by a clever

worker. Considerable differences may be made in the effect by using thick strands of wool and silk. In E 1 the stitch is worked in a direction away from the embroiderer, or exactly the contrary way to seamstress' feather-stitch, already described. Supposing a light pencil line to be marked on the material, so as to keep the centre straight, a long stitch is taken alternately to right and left of the pencil line in an ascending direction, always keeping the thread on the inside of the needle—that is, on the side next the centre line. In E 2 the long sloping stitch is crossed by a small stitch in the centre. It is made by working from right to left, taking the long stitch first, and bringing the needle up about the centre of it, a little to the left. The point of the needle is then inserted at an equal distance on the right-hand side of the long stitch, and is brought out again on the same level as the last long stitch, but slightly to the left. In these stitches, if worked on linen, or on any plain material, it will be necessary to mark two parallel lines, so as to keep the width even, unless the eye of the embroiderer be remarkably accurate, or the threads of the web are sufficiently distinct to act as a guide. In E 3 the stitch is worked exactly as the preceding one, except that there is a double cross—that is to say, the small crossing stitches are taken at each end of the long stitch in place of in the centre. In E 4 the cross-stitch is placed at one end of the long stitch.